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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000208

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/07/2015

TAGS: MARR PGOV PINS CG

SUBJECT: TENSIONS ESCALATING WITHIN CONGOLESE MILITARY IN SOUTH KIVU

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Rumors reached Kinshasa February 4 that "large numbers" of Mai Mai are massing near Bukavu in South Kivu and threatening to attack the city. PolCouns spoke February 5 and 6 to Defense Minister Adolphe Onasumba, presidential staffer Mulegwa (currently in Bukavu) and Senior Presidential Advisor Augustin Katumba about the situation. All confirmed that there has been a serious rupture between regional military commander Mbisa Mabe and leading Mai Mai commanders over the issue of salaries, Mabe's arrest of two Mai Mai commanders, and Mabe's disparaging of Mai Mai military capability. Mulegwa, who was sent to Bukavu February 1 to try to calm the situation, said that the Mai Mai have established their base in Karebe (a town about 30 kilometers from Bukavu), and he met with them there February 3 to try to dissuade them from taking further action. He failed to do so, he said, in large part because "tempers are running high."

¶2. (C) Onasumba said that the MOD estimates there are about 1,000-1,200 Mai Mai currently in the hills surrounding the road linking Bukavu to the airport. According to him, the Mai Mai are being assisted by some elements of the MLC troops stationed in Bukavu, who may be giving the Mai Mai food and encouragement. The Mai Mai have sent an ultimatum to the governor's office in Bukavu calling for the immediate removal of Mabe and the immediate payment of salary arrears, and threatening to attack the city if their demands are not met within forty-eight hours. Katumba said that President Kabila's eastern advisor, Marcellin Shikembo, will go to Bukavu February 7, carrying a letter from Kabila, to try to negotiate the Mai Mai out of their current positions. The Supreme Defense Council might meet February 7 in Kinshasa to debate possible solutions to this latest military problem in South Kivu, and Katumba said that Kabila is seriously considering ordering Mabe's immediate removal, not only because of this situation but because of Mabe's "political activities."

¶3. (C) Comment: Onasumba's assertion that the Mai Mai are being aided and abetted by MLC troops seems disingenuous at best. Given that Mabe himself -- and his deputy -- both are from Equateur, it is unlikely that the MLC troops who, by all accounts have been quite well treated in Bukavu, would be helping Mai Mai rebel against Mabe. If indeed some "regular" military elements are in league with the Mai Mai they almost certainly are RCD-G troops (Onasumba represents the RCD-G), who consider that Mabe has been systematically discriminating against them by withholding pay and refusing to assign any RCD-G commanders to choice posts. Given Mai Mai volatility and lack of discipline, they certainly could be capable of attacking Bukavu but since they haven't already done so we believe they are more interested in negotiating than in burning bridges with Kinshasa, which is, after all, their best source of pay and recognition, including in the arena of possible military integration.

¶4. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.

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